

Online personas rarely match real-life behavior, observers say

May 14 2010, By Mark Milian

Just because popular social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, encourage members to use their actual identities doesn't mean people are presenting themselves online the way they do in real life.

Some psychologists and sociologists who have studied usage habits on Twitter, Facebook and popular dating sites say there's little correlation between how people act on the Internet and how they are in person.

Research into how [personality traits](#) are filtered through the Web, especially the new breed of short-message online services, is slim, but digital-health experts have observed numerous transformations when someone ascends the Internet's world stage. Whether a person is overly chatty or arrogant on Twitter doesn't necessarily reflect on how he or she acts in the real world.

"I don't think that you could have any type of accurate or even semi-accurate personality analysis based on what people are writing in their Twitter streams. Probably the same case goes for Facebook statuses as well," said John Grohol, an online mental health expert and founder of PsychCentral.com.

"It could be the opposite. It could be that the shyest person is the person who tweets the most," Grohol said. "There has not been anything like Twitter or [Facebook](#) status updates before."

Online, people tend to exaggerate their personas because they have much

more time to revise and calculate the content they present than in spontaneous face-to-face interactions.

"The persona online may be much more fabulous, much more exciting than the everyday life that they're leading," said Julie Albright, a digital [sociologist](#) at University of Southern California, "because they see everybody else doing it."

Twitter, in many ways, has become a personal broadcast medium.

"It has turned people into mini-broadcasters," said Albright. "It makes them, in a way, stars of their own reality shows."

Albright points out that actions online can, however, influence real-life behavior. A new batch of followers on [Twitter](#) could translate into a more positive outlook.

"They can go back to their lives and have a boost of confidence," she said.

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